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ABSTRACT

This briefing paper discusses academic accommodations for high school students with disabilities. It begins by reviewing provisions under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act that require Individualized Education Programs to include a statement of the program modifications or supports that will be provided for the child to enable the child to advance appropriately, be involved and progress in the general curriculum, participate in extracurricular activities, and to be educated and participate with his or her typical peers. A chart provides examples of instructional accommodations for material and curriculum and for teaching methods. Different accommodations used for assessments are also listed, including changes to testing setting, timing, scheduling, presentation, and response requirements. Definitional considerations relating to accommodations and modifications are also discussed. Research findings on accommodations used in 12 states are reported and indicate accommodations are used by greater percentages of students at the elementary school level than at either the middle school or high school levels. A chart illustrates state-reported levels of use of accommodations for the 12 states. (Contains 13 references.) (CR)

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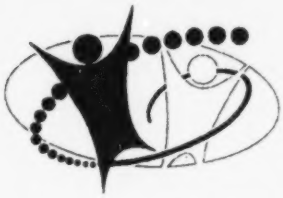
Issue Brief

Examining Current Challenges in Secondary Education and Transition



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U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, Washington, D.C.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities in High School

By Martha Thurlow

Issue: Fewer students with disabilities in middle schools and high schools use accommodations than students with disabilities in elementary schools.

Defining the Issue

Accommodations are changes in materials or procedures that provide access to instruction and assessments for students with disabilities. They are designed to enable students with disabilities to learn without the impediment of their disabilities, and to show their knowledge and skills rather than the effects of their disabilities. While there is some controversy surrounding terminology (e.g., accommodations vs. modifications) and about the appropriateness of certain assessment accommodations (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1999; Thurlow & Wiener, 2000), in general there is an acceptance of the need for some changes in instruction and assessment for students with disabilities. Examples of common instructional and assessment accommodations are shown in Table 1.

There is nothing about students with disabilities, nor about instruction and assessment that would suggest that the number of students with disabilities using accommodations should change as they progress through school. Are there other things occurring that might affect the number of students receiving accommodations? Are there constraints on the provision of accommodations that can be alleviated to ensure that all middle school and high school students who need accommodations receive them?

What We Know

Legal Considerations

When the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was reauthorized in 1997, accommodations (and modifications) in administration were addressed. In Section 300.347 on Individual Education Program (IEP) content, IDEA states that there needs to be —

. . . a statement of the program modifications or supports for school

personnel that will be provided for the child —

- To advance appropriately toward attaining the annual goals;
- To be involved and progress in the general curriculum;
- To participate in extracurricular and other nonacademic activities; and
- To be educated and participate with other children with disabilities and nondisabled children in the activities described in this section.

Authority: 20 U.S.C. 1414(d)(5): 1414(d)(1)(A)(vii)

Section 300.342 of IDEA also states that the IEP must be in effect at the beginning of each school year so that each teacher and provider is informed of "the specific accommodations, modifications, and supports that must be provided for the child in accordance with the IEP [Authority: 20 U.S.C. 1414(d)(2)(A) and (B), Pub. L. 105-17, sec. 201(a)(2)(A), (C)].

In addition to addressing accommodations and modifications in instruction, the Final Regulations for IDEA state that for assessments, the IEP for each child with a disability must include a statement of —

> Any individual modifications in the administration of state or district-wide assessments of student achievement that are needed in order for the child to participate in the assessment

The term "accommodations" is also used in Section 300.138, which indicates that —

> The state must have on file with the Secretary information to demonstrate that — (a) Children with disabilities are included in general state and district-wide assessment programs, with appropriate accommodations and modifications in administration, if necessary [Authority: 20 U.S.C. 1412(a)(17)(A)]

None of the language of the law indicates that the number of students with disabilities who need accommodations will change as students get older and

Table 1. Examples of Instructional and Assessment Accommodations*

Instructional Accommodations		Assessment Accommodations	
Materials/Curriculum	**Methods/Strategies**	**Setting**	**Presentation**
• Alternative assignments	• Highlight key points to remember	• Study carrel	• Repeat directions
• Substitute materials with lower reading levels	• Eliminate distractions by using a template to block out other items	• Special lighting	• Larger bubbles on multiple-choice questions
• Fewer assignments	• Have student use a self monitoring sheet	• Separate room	• Sign language presentation
• Decrease length of assignments	• Break task into smaller parts to do at different times	• Individualized or small group	• Magnification device
• Copy pages so students can mark on them	• Use study partners whenever reading or writing is required	**Timing**	**Response**
• Provide examples of correctly completed work	• Secure papers to work areas with tape or magnets	• Extended time	• Mark answers in test booklet
• Early syllabus	• Present information in multiple formats	• Frequent breaks	• Use reference materials (e.g., dictionary)
• Advance notice of assignments	• Use listening devices	• Unlimited time	• Word process writing sample
• Tape-recorded versions of printed materials		**Scheduling**	**Other**
		• Specific time of day	• Special test preparation techniques
		• Subtests in different order	• Out of level test

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move from one level of schooling to the next, although the specific accommodations that students need may change over time (Elliott & Thurlow, 2000).

Definitional Considerations

"Accommodation" is just one of many terms that have been used to indicate a change in instructional or assessment materials or procedures. Another frequently used term, "modification," is generally (but not always) used to refer to a change in which scores produced are invalid or otherwise not comparable to other scores. IDEA uses both "accommodation" and "modification in administration," but intends that the terms be viewed as comparable and inclusive. As stated in a memorandum from the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), "the terms as used in the statute and regulations are not intended to correspond with the evolving usage of these terms in the field of assessment . . . . 'modifications in administration' should be viewed as a general term that would include both accommodations and modifications, as they are commonly used in assessment practice" (Heumann & Warlick, 2000, p. 8).

Research Considerations

Research on accommodations has increased dramatically in recent years, due in part to an infusion of funding from OSEP, but also due to dramatic increases in state efforts to include students with disabilities in their assessments, along with the need to study the potential effects of certain accommodations on test results (see Thurlow & Bolt, 2001). Most of this research has focused on assessment accommodations and their effects (cf. Tindal & Fuchs, 1999), rather than on the extent to which students are using accommodations in instruction and assessment.

Survey research gives some indication of the extent to which accommodations are used during assessments. In a survey of approximately 400 teachers, Jayanthi, Epstein, Polloway, and Bursuck (1996) found that elementary school teachers identified several test accommodations as more helpful for students than did either middle school or secondary school teachers. In comparison to the ratings of middle school and high school teachers, they also indicated that many of the accommodations were relatively easy to implement. Still, this research did not indicate the extent to which teachers actually used accommodations, just their perceptions of them. Perceptions about accommodations do differ between the elementary and middle/secondary school levels.

Lack of information about how accommodations are used in instruction and assessments is related to some extent to limitations in the availability of accommodations prior to the reauthorization of IDEA (Thurlow, Ysseldyke, & Silverstein, 1995). It is also related to difficulties states have encountered in merging information on accommodations into data collection and management systems that have many limitations (Almond, Tindal, & Stieber, 1997).

Following the reauthorization of IDEA and recommendations that states begin to collect data on the use of testing accommodations (Elliott, Thurlow, & Ysseldyke, 1996), several states implemented data collection mechanisms to do just that. By 1999, the National Center on Educational Outcomes (NCEO) found that 12 states had data available on the number or percentage of students using assessment accommodations during their state tests. These data are reproduced in Table 2.

The data in this table reveal that in most states, accommodations are used by greater percentages of students at the elementary school level than at either the middle school or high school levels (see Thurlow, 2001). In all but two states, there is a downward trend in percentages across two or three of the school levels. For the 16 tests reflected in the table, the downward trend is evident in 95% of the possible comparisons.

What We Don't Know

We do not yet know what is happening in the majority of situations in which accommodations are being used. Most of the data that we do have on use of accommodations is from assessments, usually state-level tests. Even so, we have a relatively limited number of states able to provide data on the use of accommodations by students receiving special education services. However, given these limited data, we do not yet have a real sense of why there are differences. The survey data of Jayanthi et al.

Table 2. State-Reported Levels of Use of Accommodations

State	Assessment/ Subject Area	Elementary Grades (K-5)	Middle School Grades (6-8)	High School Grades (9-12)
Florida	FL Writing Assessment	51% (Gr 4)	39% (Gr 8)	34% (Gr 10)
	FCAT (Reading)	47% (Gr 4)	38% (Gr 8)	40% (Gr 10)
	FCAT (Math)	50% (Gr 5)	38% (Gr 8)	39% (Gr 10)
Indiana	Statewide Assessment - Math	28% (Gr 3)	34% (Gr 6)	80% (Gr 10)
			38% (Gr 8)	
	English/Language Arts	29% (Gr 3)	34% (Gr 6)	82% (Gr 10)
			38% (Gr 8)	
Kansas	KS Assessment Program – Math	21% (Gr 4)	14% (Gr 7)	08% (Gr 10)
	Reading	19% (Gr 3)	13% (Gr 7)	08% (Gr 10)
	Writing	23% (Gr 5)	17% (Gr 7)	09% (Gr 10)
Kentucky	Kentucky Core Content Test	82% (Gr 4)	72% (Gr 7)	50% (Gr 10)
		82% (Gr 5)	70% (Gr 8)	57% (Gr 11)
				55% (Gr 12)
Massachusetts	Comprehensive Assessment System	61% (Gr 4)	38% (Gr 8)	25% (Gr 10)
Maryland	MSPAP - Reading	53% (Gr 3)	25% (Gr 8)	
		51% (Gr 5)	16% (Gr 8)	
	Language Usage	44% (Gr 3)		
		41% (Gr 5)		
	Math	20% (Gr 3)		
Nevada	Terra Nova Complete Battery	51% (Gr 4)	42% (Gr 8)	44% (Gr 10)
New York	PEP Test – Reading	50% (Gr 3)	50% (Gr 6)	
	Math	31% (Gr 3)	32% (Gr 6)	
	Writing	33% (Gr 5)		
Pennsylvania	Reading and Math Assessment	67% (Gr 5)	52% (Gr 8)	45% (Gr 11)
Rhode Island	Writing Performance Assessment	49% (Gr 3)	55% (Gr 7)	60% (Gr 10)
	Health Performance Assessment	39% (Gr 5)	61% (Gr 9)	
South Dakota	Stanford Achievement Test (Language, Math, Reading, Science, Social Science)	63% (Gr 2) 67% (Gr 4)	59% (Gr 8)	46% (Gr 11)
West Virginia	SAT 9 – Language, Math, Reading, Science, Social Studies	64% (Gr 3-11)		

From Thompson, S.J., & Thurlow, M.L. (1999). *Table 7. Percent of Students Receiving Special Education Services Who Used Testing Accommodations, reprinted with permission of the National Center on Educational Outcomes.*

(1996) suggests that teachers at different grade levels do have different perceptions of the helpfulness and ease of administering many accommodations. Do these different perceptions translate into what is selected for students during assessments?

Is there any reason to believe that students with disabilities who are in the upper grade levels have less need for accommodations? Could it be that those students who most need accommodations are the students who have already dropped out of school, and therefore the percentages of students using accommodations drops simply because the ones left need fewer accommodations? Could it be that teachers' perceptions influence their willingness to provide accommodations to students who may actually need them? We do not know the answers to these questions.

Perhaps most important is the question of how what we know (and do not know) relates to the accommodations that students

receive during instruction. Most assessment guidelines speak of the need for there to be an alignment between assessment accommodations and instructional accommodations (Elliott & Thurlow, 2000; Thurlow, House, Boys, Scott, & Ysseldyke, 2000). If students with disabilities are receiving fewer accommodations during assessments in the upper grades, does this also mean that they are receiving fewer accommodations during instruction? Is this justified? Do teachers at the upper grade levels face logistical barriers that make providing accommodations nearly impossible unless the student simply cannot function without them?

The grades in which students with disabilities are involved in transition planning are the same grades in which we see declining numbers of students using accommodations. Does that mean that students are less likely to be aware of their need for accommodations because they are not being built into transition plans? If they are not built in during transition planning, do students leave school without any idea of their accommodations needs? And if so, what impact does this eventually have on their success in their postsecondary work or education?

What To Do Now

There clearly are many unanswered questions about the issue of declining percentages of students with disabilities receiving accommodations as they reach middle and high school. An important next step is to begin to answer some of the many related questions.

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